



Paradigm Comparisons

	American Dating	Group Dating	Traditional Courting	Goal-Based Interaction
Description for our Purposes.	One-o-one interaction with members of the opposite sex with little or no chaperoning or accountability beyond a curfew or parental OK of selected activity.	Chaperoned/Supervised dating or group dating usually with other Christians only. Seeks to avoid one-on-one unsupervised or unchaperoned activities.	Family interaction provides the basis for most (not all) opposite sex social interaction and relationship building. Individual one-on-one activities are few and well chaperoned. Often adds a Pre-Engagement Courting Phase.	Biblically Directed Purposeful opposite sex interaction which places the weight of defining the perimeters of this interaction squarely on the shoulders of the Father/Parent. Biblical teachings/objectives/purposes are followed and pursued as the Holy Spirit guides parents and children as they work together to build God-honoring opposite sex relationships.
Illustration of what each Paradigm might look like.	A date might look like this: Call young lady, invite her to a movie and dessert, have movie selection approved by parents and the time the daughter is to be back home is confirmed. The daughter is picked up and returned as agreed upon with no chaperoning or supervision in between.	Attending the Senior Prom (a supervised event) with another couple (Group Dating) where the ladies are picked up and dropped off in a manner that does not allow for one-on-one private interaction with their opposite sex companion.	As in the old movies where families join other families at a dance or ball. More contemporary illustration might be joining other families at sports or church events or something even more structured such as a Church Family Camp.	Follows a traditional courting model loosely; but, allows the Father/parent to customize and individualize the plan to each child and situation as guided by Biblical wisdom and the Holy Spirit in pursuit of common objectives agreed upon by both parents and children. 
Relational Side of each Paradigm.	Usually multiple exclusive relationships and accompanying breakups with premature relational commitments.	Can also have multiple exclusive relationships with premature relational commitments. However, the larger the inclusive group and the more discerning the young person, the less likely this dynamic is to occur.	Exclusive relationships are encouraged to be saved until the timing is right to pursue a marriage relationship. Premature relational commitments can still occur but are less likely to occur.	Exclusive relationships are saved for an official courting or pre-engagement experience which is a precursor to engagement and marriage. Premature relational commitments are articulated and avoided as Biblical principles concerning the edification of others and oneself are followed.
Strengths of Each Paradigm	Socially Acceptable 	Gives a greater opportunity for developing many healthy opposite sex, spiritually edifying, relationships.	Narrows the number of opposite sex relationships but enhances the preservation of spiritual qualities (purity, honesty, etc...) necessary for mutual edification.	Parents (Parental involvement is usually a positive influence) work with kids on finding a spouse and keeping every relationship above reproach and mutually edifying. Allows freedom to customize as mutual objectives are pursued with a heart tuned toward God and His Spirit.
Weaknesses of Each Paradigm	Developmental Patterns can form here that will preclude successful marriage. Promotes fornication.	This is only productive if the group one develops has high like-minded standards and ideas.	Does not always seek spiritual edification but builds future relationship on self-serving agendas. Can lead to rebellion as it is seen as too restrictive.	Over-controlling Parents can stifle individual choice in spouse selection and promote rebellion in their child. Under-involved parents failure to negotiate boundaries will make this the very worst dating paradigm.

Years ago, I was approached by a missionary from South America who was concerned about the divorce rate in the country in which she served. She attributed much of this to the inability of young people in that country to select a mate suitable for themselves. She said, “I understand you have done a lot of teaching on this, do you have any suggestions?”

I responded that the paradigm I teach as the best, assumes three things, a relationship with Christ, an acceptance of the Bible as authoritative, and a strong healthy relationship between parents and child...especially with the father. I told her I believe that great marriages and families start here. Her response shocked me; she stated, “well it won’t work in my country then. We don’t have strong families, and half the country doesn’t even know who their father is. Nobody seems to have a great relationship with their father.” With that, she walked off.

Since then I have been troubled by the usefulness of this material for those who lack such relationships. Anyone can receive Jesus and have a relationship with God. It is also possible by faith to believe the Bible and give it a place of authority in one’s life. But what does one do if this parental relationship cannot be had? Why is this such a big deal, you ask? You have God and the Bible what more do you need? Well, if you examine each of the paradigms listed above you will note, if you are a Bible scholar, that none of them are prescribed in the Bible as “the” way to secure a spouse. The Bible has truth that can be applied in any of the above paradigms. That is why all of them work for some people, some of the time. The key is how well one applies the truth in their situation. Biblical truth to be applied correctly must rely at some point on the Holy Spirit for understanding, whose presence in our life is a result of receiving Christ. However, this is not the whole picture. Without the community of faith (which is the Church) to help keep us on track, and parents who love the Lord and love us, application of Biblical truth can get pretty convoluted.....Especially when one is “In Love!” In which case, no paradigm is going to work well for you. In America, most parents love their kids and want what is best for them. Therefore, they can become great allies in helping you make the right choice for a spouse. Their role is not to pick your spouse for you, but to help you apply Biblical concepts throughout the process. They often know you better than you know yourself and will not lose their head over your latest boyfriend or girlfriend but think clearly. This is a voice you are going to need. I will speak to this more later.

So, if you are without parents, where does that voice come from? Well here are a few suggestions: grandparents, elders in your church, someone who has raised kids who all have healthy successful marriages. This has to be a person you respect and who is respected by others as well. If you still can’t find that voice, please don’t walk out on this material as my missionary friend did. Read the material, and I suggest you lock into the second paradigm with carefully selected Christian friends and a clear mind. I have seen this work well at a college level where parents are far away and out of touch.

As you work through the material you will want to choose a paradigm. This is an important part of the puzzle worth some real thought. Do not just do something because everyone else does it. Be deliberate and make a choice that is best for you.

At the end of this material you will be asked to write a covenant that will reflect your choice and the principles you hold most dear. This can be an amazing experience if you take the time and give it your best effort.